

Wulf himself, somewhat paler and thinner than of yore, but the same jovial, careless, yet at times fierce faced Wulf.

"Do I still dream, my brother, or is it you indeed?"

A happy smile spread upon the face of Wulf, for now he knew that Godwin was himself again.

"Me sure enough," he answered. "Dream folk don't have lame legs. They are the gifts of swords and men."

"And Rosamund—what of Rosamund? Did the gray horse swim the creek, and how came we here? Tell me quick—I faint for news!"

"She shall tell you herself," and, hobbling to the curtained door, he called, "Rosamund, my—nay, our cousin Rosamund, Godwin is himself again."

There was a swift rustle of robes and a sound of quick feet among the rushes that strewed the floor, and then—Rosamund herself, lovely as ever, but all her stateliness forgot in joy. She saw him, the gaunt Godwin sitting up upon the pallet, his gray eyes shining in the white and sunken face, for Godwin's eyes were gray, while Wulf's were blue, the only difference between them which a stranger would note, although in truth Wulf was a larger man. She saw him and, with a little cry of delight, ran and cast her arms about him and kissed him on the brow.

"Be careful," said Wulf roughly, turning his head aside, "or, Rosamund, you will loose the bandages and bring his trouble back again. He has had enough of bloodletting."

Then before she could answer there came the sound of a slow step, and, swinging the curtain aside, a tall and noble looking knight entered the little place. The man was old, but looked older than he was, for sorrow and sickness had wasted him. Rosamund turned and bent the knee to him with a strange and eastern grace, while Wulf bowed his head, and Godwin, since his neck was too stiff to stir, held up his hand in greeting. The old man looked at him, and there was pride in his eye. "So you will live after all, my nephew," he said, "and for that I thank the Giver of life and death, since you are a gallant man—a worthy child of the bloods of the Norman D'Arcy and of Uluin the Saxon. Yes, one of the best of them."

"Speak not so, my uncle," said Godwin; "or at least here is a worthier," and he patted the hand of Wulf with his lean fingers. "It was Wulf who bore me through."

"Would that I had been there to help in that fight," said Sir Andrew D'Arcy, tossing his white hair. "My children, I am jealous of you. Why, when I found you lying in each other's arms I could have wept for rage to think that such a fray had been within a league of my own doors and I not in it."

"I know nothing of all that story," said Godwin.

"No, in truth. How can you who have been senseless this month or more?

But Rosamund knows, and she shall tell it you. Speak on, Rosamund. Lay you back, Godwin, and listen."

"The tale is yours, my cousins, and not mine," said Rosamund. "You bade me take the water, and into it I spurred the gray horse, and we sunk deep, so that the waves closed above my head. Then up we came, I floating from the saddle, but I regained it, and the horse answered to my voice and bridle and swam out for the farther shore. On it swam somewhat slantwise with the tide, so that by turning my head I could see all that passed upon the mole. I saw them come at you and men fall before your swords. I saw you charge them and run back again. Lastly, after what seemed a very long while, when I was far away, I saw Wulf lift Godwin into the saddle—I knew it must be Godwin, because he set him on the black horse—and the pair of you galloped down the quay and vanished."

"By then I was near the home shore, and the gray grew very weary and sank deep in the water. But I cheered it on with my voice, and, although twice its head went beneath the waves, in the end it found a footing, though a soft one. After resting awhile it plunged forward with short rushes through the mud and so at length came safe to land, where it stood shaking its fear and weariness. So soon as a horse got its breath again I pressed on, for I saw them losing the boat, and came home here as the dark closed to meet your uncle watching for me at the gate. Now, father, do you set up the tale."

There is little more to tell," said Andrew. "You will remember, was, that I was against this ride—Rosamund's to seek flowers, or I don't what, at St. Peter's shrine, lies away, but as the maid had heart on it, and there are but assurances here, why, I let her go with a pair of you for escort. That I had been thinking of Sir Zelle—if such a false, virate Zelle be called a knight; not but stout and brave enough—and Co-op after he recovered from the gave him, Godwin; how to life mild come back and take for all we could do to stay Burve heard that he had sailed east to war against Saladin

—or with him, for he was ever a traitor—but even if this were so, men return from the east. Therefore I bade you arm, having some foresight of what was to come, for doubtless this onslaught must have been planned by him."

"I think so," said Wulf, "for, as Rosamund here knows, the tall knave who interpreted for the foreigner whom he called his master gave us the name of the knight Lozelle as the man who sought to carry her off."

"Was this master a Saracen?" asked Sir Andrew anxiously.

"Nay, uncle; how can I tell, seeing that his face was masked like the rest and he spoke through an interpreter? But I pray you go on with the story, which Godwin has not heard."

"It is short. When Rosamund told her tale I got together what men I could. Then, bidding her stay behind, with some of them to guard her, and nurse herself, which she was loath to do, I set out to find you or your bodies. It was dark, but we rode hard, having lanterns with us, as we went rousing men at every stead, until we came to where the roads join at Moats. There we found a black horse—your horse, Godwin—so badly wounded that he could travel no farther, and I groaned, thinking that you were dead. Still we went on till we heard another horse whinny and presently found the roan standing by the path side with his head down."

"A man on the ground holds him!" cried one, and I sprang from the saddle to see who it might be, to find that it was you, the pair of you, locked in each other's arms and senseless, if not dead, as well you might be from your wounds. I bade the country folk cover you up and carry you home and others to run to Stangate and pray the prior and the monk Stephen, who is a doctor, come at once to tend you, while we pressed onward to take vengeance if we could. We reached the quay upon the creek, but there we found nothing save some blood stains and—this is strange—your sword, Godwin, the hilt set between two stones and on the point a writing."

"What was the writing?" asked Godwin.

"Here it is," answered his uncle, drawing a piece of parchment from his robe. "Read it, one of you, since all of you are scholars and my eyes are bad."

Rosamund took it and read what was written, hurriedly, but in a clerical hand, and in the French tongue. It ran thus:

The sword of a brave man. Bury it with him if he be dead and give it back to him if he lives, as I hope. My master would wish me to do this honor to a gallant foe whom in that case he still may meet. HUGH LOZELLE, or another."

"Another, then; not Hugh Lozelle," said Godwin, "since he cannot write, and if he could would never pen words so knightly."

"The words may be knightly, but the writer's deeds were base enough," replied Sir Andrew; "nor, in truth, do I understand this scroll."

"The interpreter spoke of the short man as his master," suggested Wulf.

"Aye, nephew, but him you met. This writing speaks of a master whom Godwin may meet and who would wish the writer to pay him a certain honor."

"Perhaps he wrote thus to bind us."

"Perchance, perchance. The matter puzzles me."

"Well," said Wulf, "at the least we have seen the last of her crew of women thieves. Had they meant more mischief they would have shown themselves again ere now."

Sir Andrew looked grave as he answered.

"So I trust, but all the tale is very strange. How came they to know that you and Rosamund were riding that day to St. Peter's-on-the-Wall and so were able to waylay you? Surely some spy must have warned them, since that they were no common pirates is evident, for they spoke of Lozelle and bade you two begone unharmed, as it was Rosamund whom they needed; also there is the matter of the sword that fell from the hand of Godwin when he was hurt, which was returned in so strange a fashion. I have known many such deeds of chivalry done in the east by Paynim men."

"Well, Rosamund is half an eastern," broke in Wulf carelessly, "and perhaps that had something to do with it all."

Sir Andrew started, and the color rose to his pale face. Then in a tone in which he showed he wished to speak no more of this matter he said:

"Enough, enough. Godwin is very weak and grows weary, and before I leave him I have a word to say that it may please you both to hear. Young men, you are of my blood, the nearest to it except Rosamund, the sons of that noble knight, my brother. I have ever loved you well and been proud of you, but if this was so in the past how much more is it thus today when you have done such high service to my house! Moreover, that deed was brave and great. Nothing more knightly has been told of in Essex this many a year, and those who wrought it should no longer be simple gentlemen, but very knights. This boon it is in my power to grant to you according to the ancient custom. Still, that none may question it, while you lay sick, but after it was believed that Godwin

would live, which at first we scarcely dared to hope, I journeyed to London and sought audience of our lord the king. Having told him this tale, I prayed him that he would be pleased to grant me his command in writing that I should name you knights."

"My nephews, he was so pleased, and here I have the brief, sealed with the royal signet, commanding that in his name and my own I should give you the accolade publicly in the Church of the Priory at Stangate at such season as may be convenient; therefore Godwin, the squire, haste you to get well that you may become Sir Godwin, the knight, for you, Wulf, save for the hurt to your leg, are well enough already."

"Sir," said Godwin in a weak voice, "we do not know how to thank you for so great an honor, that we never thought to win till we had done more famous deeds than the beating off of a band of robbers. Sir, we have no more to say save that while we live we will strive to be worthy of our name and of you."

Wulf looked up, a flash of merriment upon his open face.

"I, my uncle, whose speech is, I fear me, not courtly, thank you also. I will add that I think our lady cousin here should be knighted, too, if such a thing were possible for a woman, seeing that to swim a horse across Death creek was a greater deed than to fight some rascals on its quay."

"Rosamund?" answered the old man in the same dreamy voice. "Her rank is high enough—too high, far too high for safety." And, turning, he left the little chamber.

"Well, cousin," said Wulf, "if you cannot be a knight, at least you can lessen all this dangerous rank of yours by becoming a knight's wife," whereat Rosamund looked at him with indignation which struggled with a smile in her dark eyes and, murmuring that she must see to the making of Godwin's broth, followed her father from the place.

"It would have been kinder had she told us that she was glad," said Wulf when she was gone.

"Perhaps she would," answered his brother, "had it not been for your rough jests, Wulf, which might have a meaning in them."

"Nay; I had no meaning. Why should she not become a knight's wife?"

"Aye, but what knight's? Would it please either of us, brother, if, as may well chance, he should be some stranger?"

Now Wulf swore a great oath, then flushed to the roots of his fair hair and was silent.

"God's truth, brother, you are right, as ever. But we are in fortune's path today, Godwin. Oh, that was a lucky ride! Such fighting as I have never seen or dreamed of! We won it too! And now both of us are alive and a knight's wife for each!"

CHAPTER III

ON the last day of November, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, a great procession might have been seen wending its way from the old hall at Steeple. In it rode many knights fully armed, before whom were borne their banners. These went first. Then came old Sir Andrew D'Arcy, also fully armed, attended by squires and retainers. He was accompanied by his lovely daughter, the Lady Rosamund. Next appeared the brethren, modestly arrayed as simple gentlemen, followed each of them by his squire. After them rode yet more knights, squires, tenants of various degree and servants.

Following the road through the village, the procession turned to the left at the great arch which marked the boundary of the monks' lands and headed for Stangate abbey, some two miles away. At length they came to the stone gate of the abbey that gave the place its name of Stangate. Here they were met by a company of the Cluniac monks, who dwelt in this wild and lonely spot upon the water's edge, headed by their prior, John Fitz Brian. He was a venerable, white haired man, clad in wide sleeved black robes and preceded by a priest carrying a silver cross. Now the procession separated, Godwin and Wulf, with certain of the knights and their esquires, being led to the priory, while the main body of it entered the church or stood about outside its door.

Arrived at the house, the two knights elect were taken to a room, where their hair was cut and their chins were shaved by a barber who awaited them. Then, under the guidance of two old knights named Sir Anthony de Mandeville and Sir Roger de Mercel, they were conducted to baths surrounded with rich cloths. Into these, having been undressed by the squires, they entered and bathed themselves, while Sir Anthony and Sir Roger spoke to them through the cloths of the high duties of their vocation, ending by pouring water over them and signing their bare bodies with the sign of the cross. Next they were dressed again and, preceded by minstrels, led to the church, at the porch of which they and their esquires were given wine to drink.

Here, in the presence of all the company, they were clothed first in white tunics, to signify the whiteness of their

hearts next in red robes, symbolical of the blood they might be called upon to shed for Christ, and lastly in long black cloaks, emblems of the death that must be endured by all. This done, their armor was brought in and piled before them upon the steps of the altar, and the congregation departed homeward, leaving them with their esquires and the priest to spend the long winter night "in orisons and prayers."

Long indeed it was in that lonesome, holy place, lit only by a lamp which swung before the altar. Wulf prayed and prayed until he could pray no more, then fell into a half dreamful state that was haunted by the face of Rosamund, where even her face should have been forgotten. Godwin, his elbow resting against the tomb that hid his father's heart, prayed also until even his earnestness was outworn, and he began to wonder about many things.

What might be the true duty of man? he thought. To be brave and upright? Surely. To fight for the cross of Christ against the Saracen? Surely, if the chance came his way. What more? To abandon the world and spend his life muttering prayers—like those priests in the darkness behind him? Could that be needful or of service to God or man? It would mean, for instance, that he must think no more of Rosamund. Could he do this for the sake of the welfare of his soul in some future state?

Why, at the thought of it even in that solemn place and hour of dedication his spirit reeled, for then and there for the first time it was borne in upon him that he loved this woman more than all the world beside—more than his life, more, perhaps, than his soul. He loved her with all his pure young heart—so much that it would be a joy to him to die for her, not only in the heat of battle, as lately had almost chanced on the Death creek quay, but in cold blood, of set purpose, if there came need. He loved her with body and with spirit, and, after God, to her he consecrated his body and his spirit. But what value would she put upon the gift? What if some other man—

By his side, his elbows resting on the altar rails, his eyes fixed upon the beaming armor that he would wear in battle, knelt Wulf, his brother—a mighty man, a knight of knights, fearless, noble, open hearted; such a one as any woman might well love. And he also loved Rosamund. Of this Godwin was sure. And, oh, did not Rosamund love Wulf? Bitter jealousy seized upon his vitals.

Should he abandon hope? Should he fly the battle for fear that he might be



He also loved Rosamund.

defeated? Nay, he would fight on in all honesty and honor, and if he were overcome would meet his fate as a brave knight should—without bitterness, but without shame. Let destiny direct the matter. It was in the hands of destiny, and, stretching out his arm, he threw it around the neck of his brother, who knelt beside him, and let it rest there until the head of the weary Wulf sank sleepily upon his shoulder, like the head of an infant upon its mother's breast.

At length the gray dawn broke, and the sunlight, passing through the eastern window, like a golden spear pierced the dusk of the long church, which was built to the shape of a cross, so that only its transepts remained in the shadow. Then came a sound of chanting, and at the western door entered the prior, wearing all his robes, attended by the monks and acolytes, who swung censers. In the center of the nave he halted and passed to the confessional, calling on Godwin to follow.

So he went and knelt before the holy man and there poured out all his heart. He confessed his sins. They were but few. He told him of his deep love, his hopes, his fears and his desire to be a warrior who once, as a lad, had wished to be a monk, not that he might shed blood, but to fight for the cross of Christ against the Paynim, ending with a cry of—

"Give me counsel, O my father! Give me counsel!"

"Your own heart is your best counselor," was the priest's answer. "Go as it guides you, knowing that through it is God who guides. Nor fear that you will fail. But if love and the joys

of life should leave you, my son, back, and we will talk again. You are a pure knight of Christ, fearless and sure of the reward, and may you the blessing of Christ and his church."

Then with a lightened heart returned to the altar rails, where brother Wulf was summoned to his place in the confessional, since that he had to tell his sins. They were such as no man to young men and none very grievous. Still before his absolution the good prior asked him to think less of his body and of his spirit, less of the glory of arms and more of the truth which he should enter on the bade him, moreover, to take his Godwin as an earthly guide, ample, since there lived no wiser man of his years, and thus missed him, prophesying that would heed these counsels he come to great glory on earth and heaven.

"Father, I will do my best," answered Wulf humbly, "but I cannot be two Godwins, and, father, times I fear me that our paths cross, since two men cannot be a woman."

"I know the trouble," answered the prior anxiously, "and with less natured men it might be grave if it should come to this, that the lady judge according to the of her own heart, and he who must be loyal in sorrow as he sure that you take no base of your brother in the hour of trial and bear him no bitterness be with the bride."

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